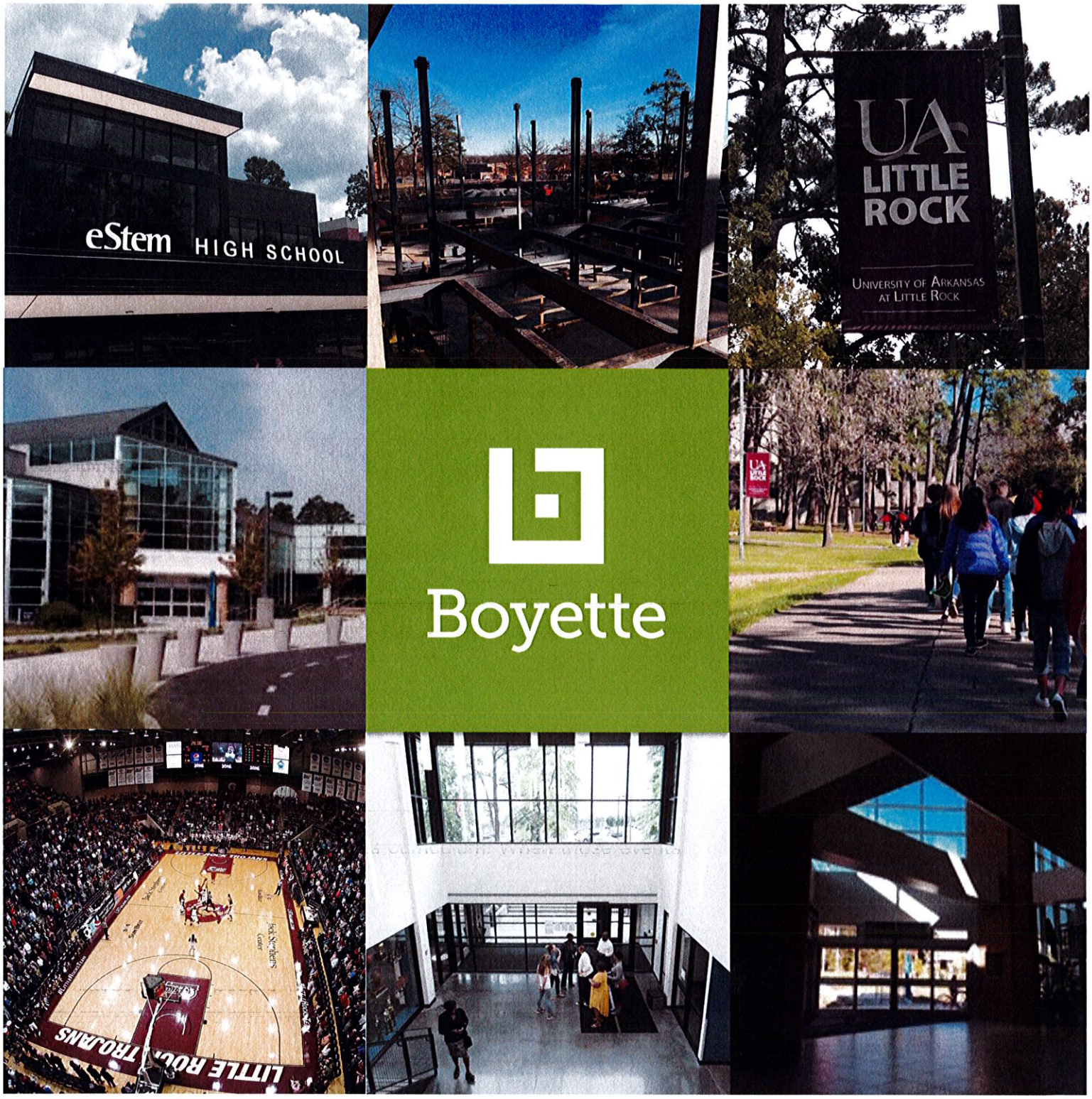


University of Arkansas at Little Rock – eStem Public Charter Schools

Feasibility Enhancement Study

10.2018

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background 03

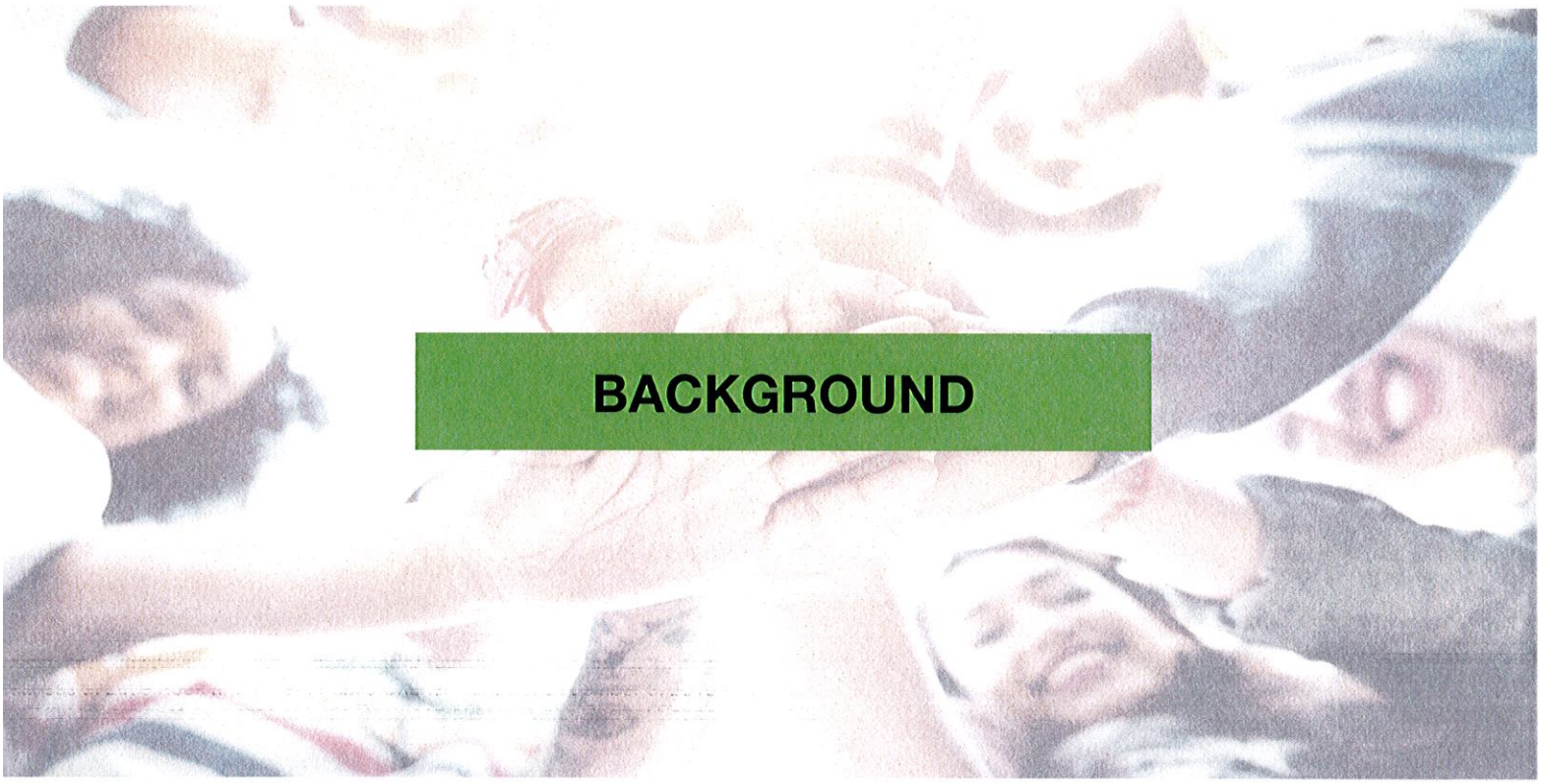
Methodology 07

Findings 08

Conclusions 20

Recommendations 28

Endnotes 36



BACKGROUND

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UA Little Rock) has been a critical part of the capital city's education landscape since 1927, when the institution opened as Little Rock Junior College. Today, UA Little Rock is a metropolitan university serving as a source of learning for its students and as an important partner in Little Rock's success.

eStem Public Charter Schools (eStem) is an independent charter school that opened its doors in 2008 in downtown Little Rock. Ten years later, eStem has grown to three campus locations with a total enrollment of nearly 2,000 students in grades K-12, with thousands more on a waiting list.

Almost four years ago, these two respected institutions began to discuss the idea of a partnership that would allow eStem to continue growing its enrollment, while also enhancing its educational offerings on the UA Little Rock campus.

Educators from both institutions believed this idea would not only benefit both UA Little Rock and eStem, but would also play a significant role in strengthening STEM education in Arkansas, a key to meeting the future workforce demands of Central Arkansas employers.

Initially, a group of five UA Little Rock faculty members were appointed by Provost Zulma Toro to the UALR – eStem School Task Force and charged with studying the concept. Their work culminated in a concept white paper published in February 2015 titled "Exploring the Possibility of a Campus-Based eStem K-12 Charter School at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock."

That report outlined goals and challenges of the concept, in addition to considering construction and operating costs. It also identified likely advantages of eStem locating on the UA Little Rock campus.

> **"Just saying it's someone else's problem is not acceptable.**

That paper recommended a "Phase-In Plan" for eStem's move to the UA Little Rock campus, with Larson Hall potentially serving as the initial location. It proposed a three-year timeline for development of adequate infrastructure to house the ultimate target enrollment of 1,500 students in grades 9-12, with grades 9 and 10 remaining in Larson Hall and a second location developed to serve grades 11 and 12. [1] While parking, traffic and safety were raised as concerns, the paper identified significant advantages ranging from joint use of laboratory space to training opportunities for university students. [2]

By July 2015, talks between UA Little Rock and eStem had solidified the idea, and an agreement was signed to enter into a "mutual collaboration to construct and renovate facilities on the UALR campus for students of eStem in grades 9-12." The agreement called for the university to purchase property abutting 28th Street (.41 acres) to be sold to eStem at a price of $50,000, $80,000 below appraised value.

A new 60,000-square-foot facility was envisioned for that property to house eStem students in grades 9 and 10 beginning in July 2017. Additionally, UA Little Rock agreed to a long-term lease of Larson Hall, which would be renovated, and would make space available in Ross Hall if the Larson Hall space was not adequate to accommodate all eStem students. [3] Further, the agreement briefly defined the collaborative relationship between the two institutions, including opportunities for earning college credit, use of various campus facilities, and financial arrangements for services to be provided.[4]

The partnership, which was approved by the UA Little Rock Board of Visitors on August 14, 2015, [5] was publicly announced three days later, following approval by the Building and Grounds Committee of the University of Arkansas Board of Trustees. [6] The Arkansas Department of Education then approved a request to increase eStem enrollment in November 2015.

Soon after, the university and eStem applied to the Little Rock Planning Commission for a conditional use permit for construction of a facility on the 28th Street site that was currently zoned for residential use. At a meeting in late September 2015, action on the application was deferred by the Planning Commission until November 5, 2015. [7] Prior to the deferral, city staff requested a traffic study be completed for the site.

Results of the traffic study were provided to the Planning Commission prior to the November 5 meeting, but the item was again deferred to December 17. At that time, it was placed on the consent agenda and deferred to January 2016. [8] At the January meeting, city staff reported that the applicant had withdrawn the application for a conditional use permit. [9]

On August 15, 2016, a year after the partnership was approved by the Board of Visitors, the university and eStem announced plans for a groundbreaking ceremony to be held in September. However, the news release referred to revised plans and only mentioned renovation of Larson Hall. [10] Prior to the September groundbreaking, a Lease Agreement referencing a "Revised Project" was executed between the two institutions and was signed by Dr. Donald R. Bobbitt on behalf of

the University of Arkansas Board of Trustees on August 29, 2016. [11] (Boyette did not review all Board of Visitors minutes for the last three years, but it appears that the "Revised Project" was not approved by the UA Little Rock Board of Visitors.)

The Lease Agreement establishes a 30-year lease of properties in Exhibit A to the Agreement. That exhibit contains a map showing Larson Hall, Ross Hall, Education, Admin. South and Admin. North. [12] In addition to terms related to real property, the Lease Agreement also provides that eStem will house grades 10-12 at UA Little Rock and outlines benefits the partnership will provide to eStem students and employees, including opportunities for attending university classes and use of campus facilities. [13]

Further details of the collaborative relationship were set forth in a Memorandum of Understanding that was signed by eStem officials on November 30, 2016, and by UA Little Rock officials in early December 2016. That document addresses a variety of issues from student conduct to facilities use and security. It was then amended in July 2017 to further detail facilities use and financial arrangements, including assessment of a per-student fee for eStem students, which was set at $133.33 per student for the 2017 – 2018 school year. [14]

The new eStem High School facility in the renovated Larson Hall opened with just under 500 students in grades 10-12 in August 2017. While administrators from both institutions had worked collaboratively to put in place an operational model for the school, some challenges quickly began to surface. According to stakeholders, the university dining hall was not prepared to accommodate the new students, and space was inadequate to meet the needs of both high school and college students during lunch periods. There were also complaints about eStem student behavior in the library and in outdoor spaces in proximity to Larson and Ross Halls. Additionally, traffic flow, particularly during student arrival and dismissal, created some issues on and near campus.

A committee of three administrators from each institution began meeting regularly to address the operational issues in a timely and efficient way. While the day-to-day challenges appeared to ease, frustration and animosity seemed to increase among broader stakeholder audiences from both UA Little Rock and eStem.

In January 2018, the UA Little Rock Faculty Senate approved a resolution recommending renegotiation of the MOU to limit eStem enrollment; reconsider use of Ross Hall; provide priority to university students for use of the dining hall, gymnasium and library; and address traffic issues, among others. The university also established an online portal for students and staff to report incidents involving eStem students. Those reports were shared with the joint administrative committee for monitoring and resolution.

While solutions were found to many of the operational challenges, they were often little more than a "bandaid" approach, not a long-term answer that would protect the integrity of the partnership. In December 2017, UA Little Rock Chancellor Dr. Andrew Rogerson proposed creation of a task force to "find a

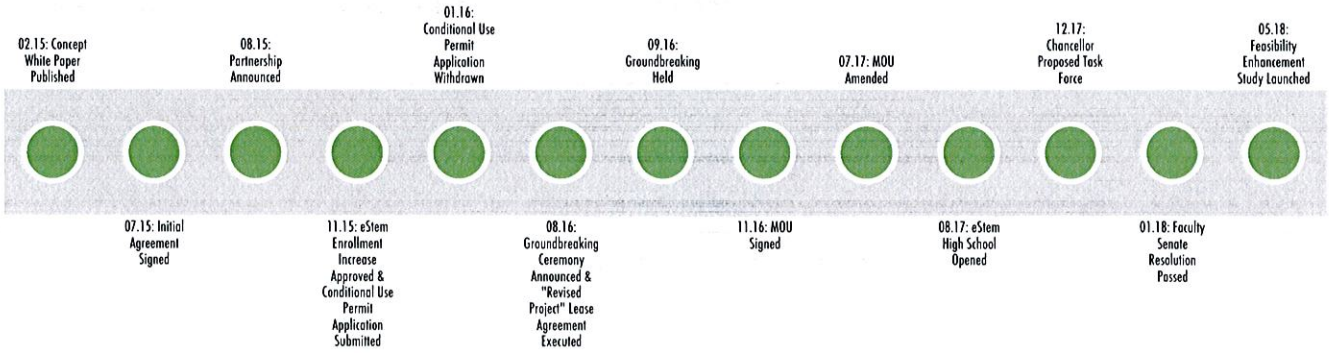
way forward that is beneficial to both eStem and UA Little Rock."

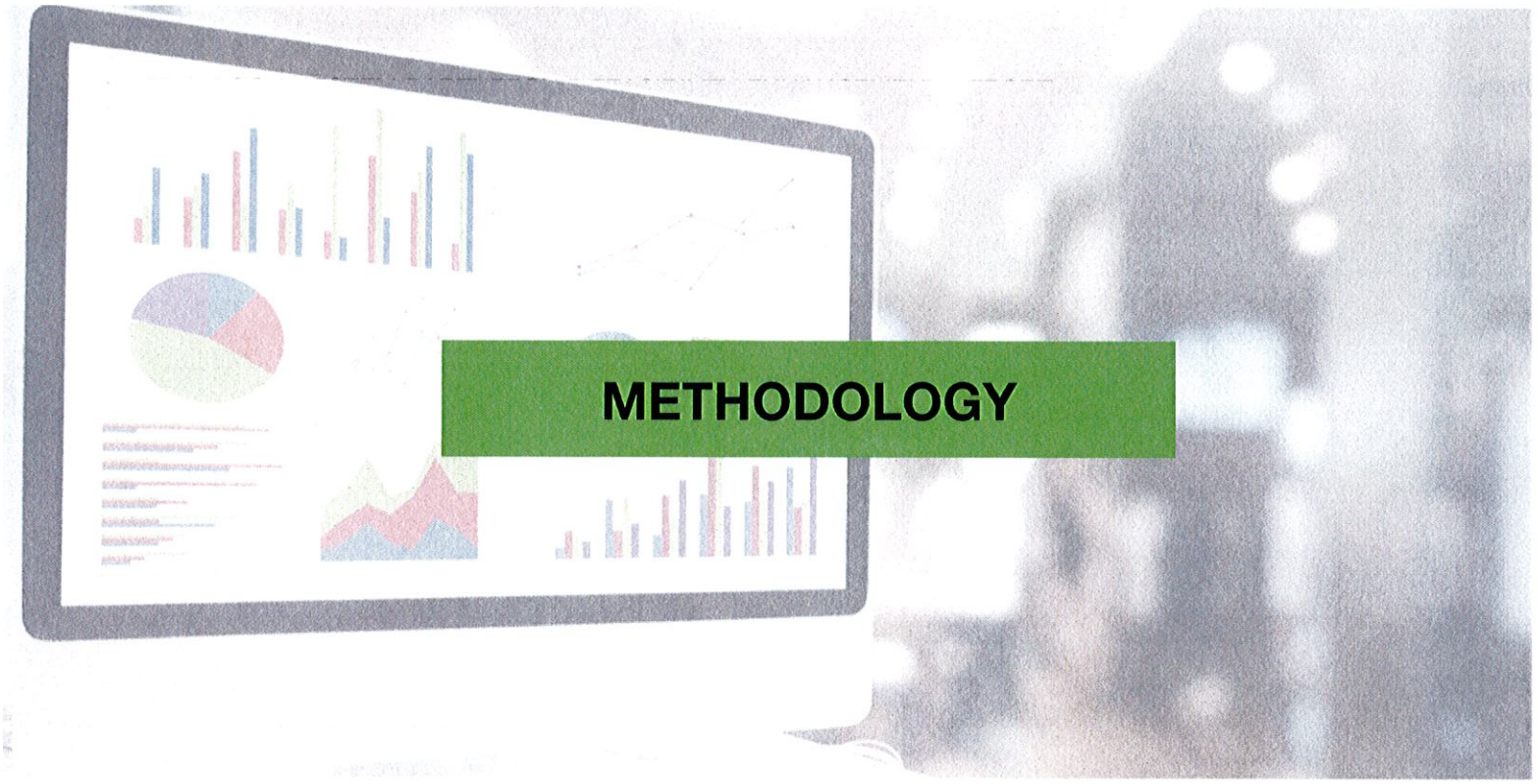
In late Spring 2018, a group of administrators from the two institutions, joined by stakeholders and community leaders, came together and engaged Boyette Strategic Advisors (Boyette) to complete a feasibility enhancement study of the partnership.

While it is impossible to unravel all aspects of the relationship and start fresh, this study has explored the challenges identified in the first year of eStem's operation on the UA Little Rock campus; engaged with stakeholders; researched similar partnerships in other areas; and considered opportunities to build upon positive aspects of this collaboration. What follows is a summary of both qualitative and quantitative research; analysis and findings from that research; conclusions about the current state of the partnership; and recommendations to enhance the relationship to the benefit of both institutions and their stakeholders.

Note that Boyette reviewed a wide range of documents associated with the partnership. Those can be found in an Appendix, which is a separate accompanying document. It also contains a list of stakeholders who participated in this process, along with a summary of stakeholder findings and of an online survey fielded as part of this process.

UA Little Rock – eStem Partnership Timeline





METHODOLOGY

In order to thoroughly assess the current partnership between UA Little Rock and eStem, it was critical to have an understanding of the ideas that drove the relationship and how it is currently functioning. Additionally, it is important to know how the UA Little Rock – eStem arrangement compares with other institutions that have successfully established similar partnerships.

The Boyette team conducted a series of interviews and discussion groups with stakeholders for both institutions. These discussions were based on an *Appreciative Inquiry* process to ensure that the positive aspects of the partnership were acknowledged and valued, while still allowing the opportunity to discuss challenges. In addition to these discussions, an online survey was fielded with eStem High School parents to gauge their perceptions of the relationship.

Several documents that have been developed in preparation for and as a result of the partnership between the two institutions were also reviewed.

Stakeholder Discussions
35 stakeholders interviewed

eStem Parent Survey
265 parent responses

Secondary Research
Previous documents reviewed
30 institutions examined
Campus observations

These included, but are not limited to, the following:

- Concept White Paper
- Initial Agreement
- Lease Agreement
- Memorandum of Understanding & Amendments
- News Releases & Media Coverage

Boyette also conducted research in an effort to benchmark the institutional relationship against similar arrangements at other colleges and universities nationwide. Finally, the Boyette team spent time on campus to observe the eStem drop-off/pickup/parking process, as well as lunch services in the Donaghey Student Center.

FINDINGS

All qualitative and quantitative research was thoroughly analyzed to identify the assets and challenges of the relationship between UA Little Rock and eStem.

Stakeholder engagement was very valuable in assessing the challenges encountered in the first year of eStem High School's operation on the university campus, as well as understanding adjustments that have been made since the opening of school in Fall 2017. In addition, the online parent survey offered perspective related to operational challenges that are directly impacting the high school students and their families, in addition to their hopes for the future.

The additional secondary research provided insight into the types of high schools located on college campuses around the country, including size, location, specific academic focus areas, admission requirements, and opportunities for integration with the host institution of higher education.

> "I think we are still in the early days of what I hope will be a long-term partnership and that we all keep our minds open to the appropriate course corrections as we go.

STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS

The stakeholder engagement portion of this project included one-on-one interviews with key leaders of both UA Little Rock and eStem, as well as other community leaders and supporters of the two institutions. Additionally, group discussions were conducted with both UA Little Rock and eStem students who were invited to participate by the individual institutions. These discussions provided some context to the development of the partnership over the past four years, as well as the operational challenges that were encountered in the first year of eStem's operation on the university campus.

The following themes emerged in those conversations:

Common Themes

- Challenges are focused on operational issues
- Expenses are a concern
- Difficulty in identifying any benefits
- Renovation of Larson Hall improved overall campus beauty
- Confusion surrounds opportunities for dual enrollment/concurrent credit

All stakeholders were asked to identify the first things that needed to happen to enhance the partnership between eStem and UA Little Rock. Almost all agreed that it is essential for the two institutions to come together to maximize the opportunities offered by this partnership.

Stakeholders also expressed ways that both institutions could be mutually beneficial to each other and discussed how to go about making that happen. Stakeholders said that in order for eStem to benefit from the partnership, the opportunity for dual enrollment and concurrent credit would need to be made available to eStem students. Many stakeholders said that in order for UA Little Rock to benefit from the partnership, there would need to be increased enrollment from eStem students.

Other ideas for immediate change were focused on operational challenges. For example, the majority of stakeholders expressed that eStem needs its own cafeteria to ease the strain on the UA Little Rock café and food court, even though some of those challenges have now been addressed. To address challenges associated with student arrival and dismissal, some stakeholders suggested having space in the University Plaza area could offer a place for students to gather during arrival and pick-up times.

Throughout the stakeholder engagement process, stakeholders discussed ways to enhance the partnership between eStem and UA Little Rock. Many said that eStem being on the UA Little Rock campus exposes students to the next step in the higher education process. Several stakeholders believe that both organizations should identify opportunities to enhance eStem students' overall

educational experience. Some specific ideas included a mentoring program, shadowing a college student, and outreach on an academic level. Stakeholders also said that eStem students could participate in UA Little Rock's college or departmental events that align with the students' chosen career explorations.

Stakeholders suggested that dual enrollment, concurrent credit offerings, and the opportunity for eStem students to graduate with a high school diploma and an associate degree were key components of the agreement between both organizations. Because those offerings have not yet been made available, many suggested that the two institutions need to develop a specific agreement to allow eStem students to have access to these opportunities.

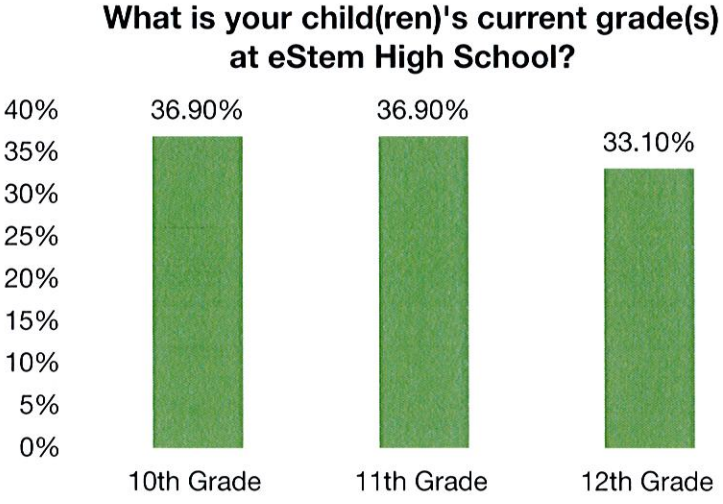
Interviewees also said that there should be metrics in place that measure the benefits to both organizations from the partnership, with many believing the collaboration has the ability to be a "one of a kind" unique model across the country. Stakeholders stated that both organizations should put a positive spin on the partnership at hand and determine a path forward that allows both organizations to benefit from the relationship.

PARENT SURVEY

Parents of eStem High School students were surveyed as part of the stakeholder engagement process to evaluate their perspectives on the partnership between eStem and UA Little Rock. Survey responses can be seen below.

Current Grade

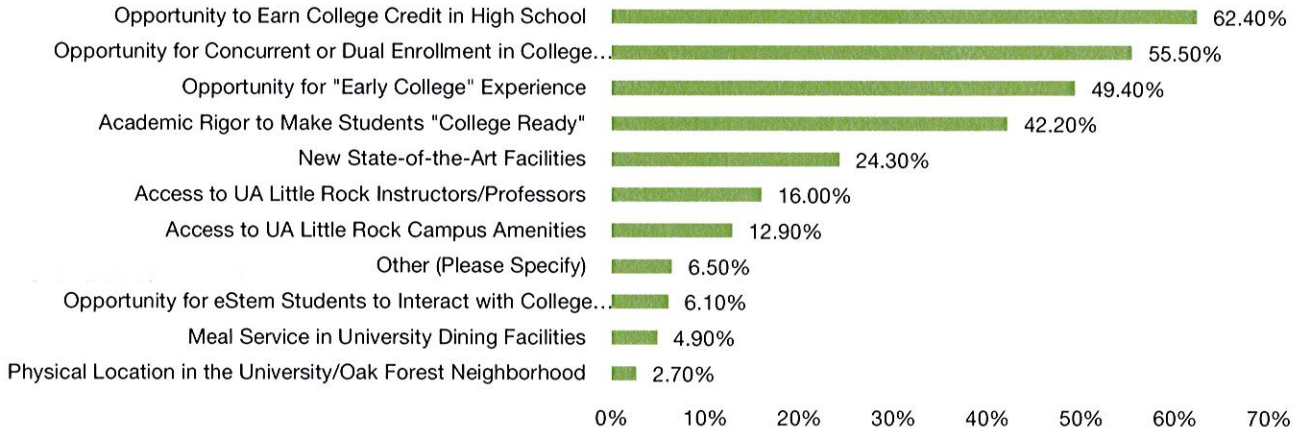
Parents were asked to identify the current grade of their child(ren) at eStem High School. The respondents almost evenly represented all three grades.



Greatest Advantages

Parents were asked to identify the greatest advantages of eStem High School's location on the UA Little Rock campus. Their responses were strongly focused on the opportunity to earn college credit in high school, followed by the opportunity for concurrent or dual enrollment in college courses. Those options related to college preparation followed.

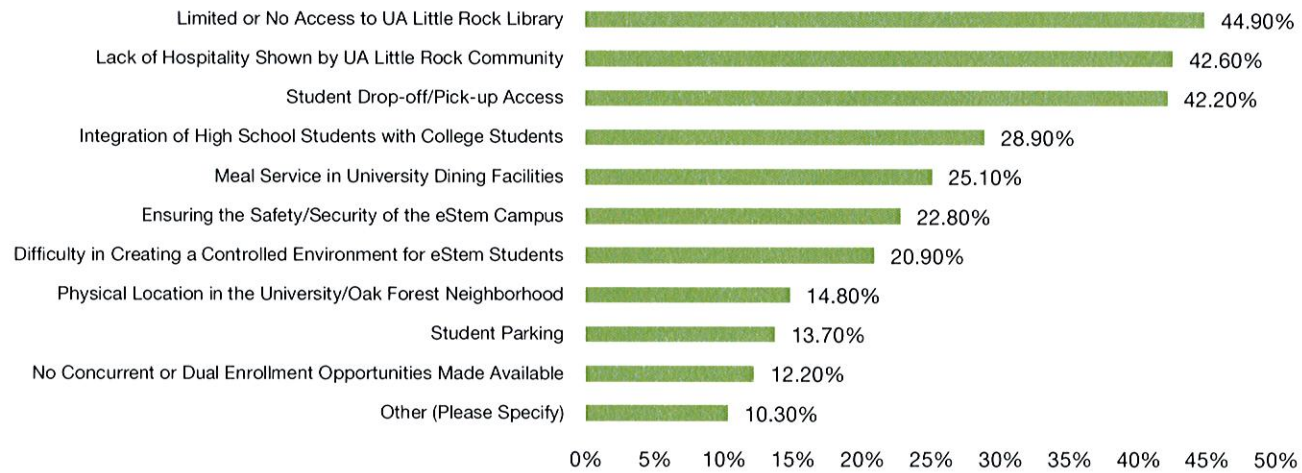
What do you believe are the three greatest advantages of eStem High School being located on the campus of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock? (Please select three from the list below.)



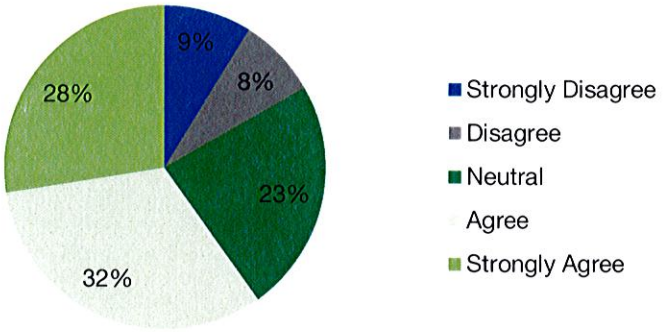
Greatest Challenges

Parents were also asked to identify the greatest challenges of eStem High School's location on the UA Little Rock campus. The majority of parents were concerned about limited or no access to the UA Little Rock library, followed by lack of hospitality shown by UA Little Rock community, student drop-off/Pick-up access and integration of high school students with college students.

What do you believe are the three greatest challenges of eStem High School's location on the UA Little Rock campus?



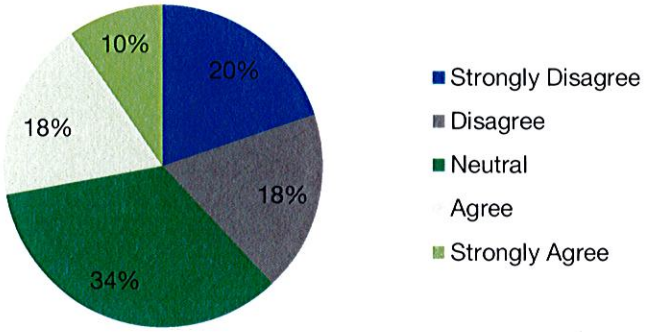
Attending high school in a college environment makes my child more prepared for college upon graduation.



Parents were given the following statement "Attending high school in a college environment makes my child more prepared for college upon graduation" and given the options to answer strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree or strongly agree.

One-third of parents agreed with the statement and 28 percent strongly agreed with the statement. Only 15 percent of parents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, and just under one quarter were neutral.

Attending high school on the UA Little Rock campus will make my child more likely to attend UA Little Rock upon graduation.



Parents were given the following statement "Attending high school on the UA Little Rock campus will make my child more likely to attend UA Little Rock upon graduation" and given the options to answer strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree or strongly agree.

More than one-third of parents responded neutral to the statement, while 38 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. A combined 28 percent of parents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

While stakeholder engagement was critical, secondary research also played an important role in thoroughly examining the existing relationship between UA Little Rock and eStem. Additionally, qualitative research was conducted to identify best practices that might exist in partnerships between high schools and post-secondary institutions in other markets. Finally, observations related to potential operational issues provided further documentation of the challenges associated with the current collaboration.

In order to ensure a baseline understanding of the partnership between UA Little Rock and eStem, the Boyette team reviewed the following documents which outlined the concept and the arrangement between the two institutions:

- Concept White Paper (February 5, 2015)
- Initial Agreement (July 24, 2015)
- Lease Agreement (August 29, 2016)
- Memorandum of Understanding & Amendments (December 9, 2016)
- News Releases & Media Coverage

Copies of each of these documents are found in the Appendices to this report. Following is a summary of information gathered from each of these documents:

Concept White Paper [15]

- Developed by task force of UA Little Rock staff appointed by the Provost to explore potential for a STEM-focused high school on the campus in collaboration with eStem
- Summarized recent trends in STEM education, indicating it is underdeveloped in Arkansas compared to other states
- Explored STEM skills demand and benefits of a STEM education
- Identified Larson Hall as a suggested location, with a cost estimate of $60 million to update infrastructure and design the building to house 1,500 students
- Determined that Larson Hall would accommodate a maximum of 360 students in its existing square footage
- Recommended a phased in approach, with grades 9 and 10 initially remaining on the downtown eStem campus and grades 11 and 12 moving into renovated space in Larson Hall
- Suggested a second location would be needed to ultimately serve eStem's full enrollment of 1,500, with the former Education Building mentioned as a possibility
- Other options mentioned for expansion include:
  - A multi-story facility on the site of Larson Hall
  - Use of Ross Hall
  - Construction on Lot 5 site
  - Use of University Plaza site
  - Expansion to University District North of campus
- Proposed shared use of university laboratory space for chemistry and biology
- Suggested eStem faculty and students participate in STEM related research being conducted by UA Little Rock
- Offered use of university sports facilities and fitness center by eStem students
- While providing access to the university library, the document suggested eStem would have its own library as well
- Recommended university faculty share some teaching responsibilities at eStem, particularly for upper level classes, and that eStem faculty fill adjunct roles at the university
- Identified several scholarships that would provide financial support to eStem graduates enrolling at UA Little Rock

- Suggested eStem offers field placement opportunities for UALRTeach program
- Determined likely safety challenges requiring hiring additional campus police officers
- Believed parking and traffic also present challenges
- Identifieds potential sources of internal and external funding
- Suggested concurrent enrollment opportunities must be a component of the collaboration

Initial Agreement (July 2015) [16]

- Initial agreement between U of A Board of Trustees and eStem signed on July 24, 2015
- Called for collaboration to construct and renovate facilities on the UA Little Rock campus for use by eStem for grades 9-12
- Included sale of property on campus abutting 28th Street to eStem for the price of $50,000
- Provided for lease of Larson Hall to eStem, with eStem responsible for renovation, maintenance, utilities and insurance
- Assumed renovation of Larson Hall by eStem at an estimated cost of $3.5 million
- Included construction of a 60,000-square-foot facility on 28th Street property to house students in grades 9 and 10
- Made Ross Hall available to eStem for any students not accommodated in Larson Hall
- Called for collaborative relationship allowing eStem students and employees to attend classes for credit at the university and to use the recreational, physical fitness, art, music, and theater programs and other facilities in the same manner as university students and employees
- Offered university services for campus security, janitorial, maintenance, landscaping and internet availability based on agreed to financial arrangements

Lease Agreement [17]

- Signed in August 2016, based on July 2015 general agreement for the partnership
- Refers to the "Revised Project" and proposes to lease property to eStem, rather than sell property on 28th Street for new construction
- Defines property to be leased in "Exhibit A," which shows a map including Larson Hall, Ross Hall, Education, Admin. South and Admin. North
- Initial lease term of 30 years, with option for four 5-year renewals
- Sets rent cost at $1.00 per year
- Specifies use of the property is a public charter school for grades 10-12
- Proposes an $11.4 million non-interest bearing loan from the Walton Family Foundation for renovation of Larson Hall and Ross Hall, with construction in three phases, and specifies rights of the Walton Family Foundation in the event eStem defaults on the lease agreement
- Provides for eStem students and employees to attend classes for credit at the university at ½ the applicable tuition rate
- Provides for use of recreational, physical fitness, art, music and theater programs, as well as student commons, cafeteria, athletic facilities, auditoriums, meeting spaces, and other facilities, subject to payment of fees applicable to university employees and students

MOU and Amendments [18]

- MOU signed in December 2016 specifies operational and programmatic parameters for collaboration
- Subjects all eStem students to UA Little Rock Student Code of Conduct and defines other behavioral expectations
- Establishes dining options for eStem students, including access to all dining establishments on campus and tray meals meeting federal nutritional guidelines
- Determines that eStem students pay standard rates for all concurrent courses available exclusively to eStem students
- Allows eStem to use university faculty to teach concurrent courses by hiring them at the standard lecturer rate
- Provides that eStem students pay a flat rate of ½ the current tuition rate and ½ the applicable student fees for all dual enrollment courses
- Specifies that eStem classroom space will be located in Larson Hall and the third floor of Ross Hall, with construction and renovation in three phases to conclude by 2026 with a total of 45 classrooms
- Includes eStem total enrollment and classroom needs by year, with 450 students enrolled in 2017-18 expanding to 1,125 in 2026-27
- Makes available access to parking, athletic facilities (for eStem teams), the fitness center (with supervision), the bookstore, dining facilities and library; specifies list of other facilities not available to eStem students
- Defines services provided by the university under acceptable financial arrangements
- Establishes the Facility Usage Advisory Committee with representatives of both institutions
- Requires both institutions to collaborate on development of orientation materials for eStem students and families
- Specifies security procedures and use of identification cards for eStem students
- Outlines campus parking requirements
- Includes agreement for fiber optic cabling and IT services
- Amendment signed in July 2017 further defines financial arrangements and facilities use
- Establishes a 2017-18 headcount of 450 students and a per student fee of $133.33, payable in $5,000 monthly installments

Additionally, Boyette conducted secondary research in an effort to identify other relationships between high schools and colleges/universities that might serve as benchmarks for the UA Little Rock – eStem collaboration. That effort proved somewhat challenging, because no truly comparable models were identified. However, there were significant findings that were identified through this research activity, which are outlined below and are followed by more detail about five schools that had some similarities to the UA Little Rock – eStem relationship.

Common Themes

- Most high school/college collaborations are formed as Early or Middle High Schools
- Enrollment is generally significantly smaller than expected enrollment at eStem
- Some have admissions criteria beyond a lottery
- Partnerships are often with community colleges, not four-year institutions

SCHOOL	ADMISSION PROCESS	ENROLLMENT	ACADEMIC FOCUS	INTEGRATION ACTIVITIES
Metro Early College High School – The Ohio State University (Grades 9 – 12) [19]	Non-selective Lottery	Capped at 400 (100 per grade)	STEM (Part of the Ohio STEM Learning Network)	▪ High School students attend university convocation ▪ Required to complete 70 community service hours/year ▪ Joint campus scavenger hunt ▪ Metro Fellows program matching PhD candidates and high school faculty for one year
Engineering & Science University Magnet Middle & High School – University of New Haven (Grades 6 – 12) [20]	Non-selective Lottery	600	Engineering & Science	▪ Relationship with university focused on academics ▪ Admission to Segue To Education Program based on application & interview process ▪ STEP program allows one college course per semester free of charge ▪ Graduates meeting admission criteria receive minimum ½ tuition scholarship to UNH
University High School – California State University, Fresno (Grades 9 – 12) [21]	Lottery (two years of musical experience required)	480	Music	▪ Sophomore year World History is college course ▪ Juniors & seniors take university foreign language and geology courses ▪ Students may purchase a university meal plan

SCHOOL	ADMISSION PROCESS	ENROLLMENT	ACADEMIC FOCUS	INTEGRATION ACTIVITIES
Campus International High School – Cleveland State University (Grades 9 & 10, with 11 and 12 added in coming years) [22]	Lottery	95	International Baccalaureate Model and Diploma Programme Candidate School	▪ School District invested $9.5 million to renovate existing university building ▪ 50-year land lease for 2.5 acres cost $2.2 million ▪ Students participate in the College Credit Plus program ▪ Annual Campus Conference: a Youth Research Symposium in collaboration with CSU College of Education & Human Services
Early College High School – Trident Technical College (Charleston, SC) (Grade 9, with 10, 11 and 12 added in coming years) [23]	Application Process includes standardized test score minimums; preference for first-generation college students and under-represented groups	100 (expanding to 400 as additional grades are added)	None	▪ 9th Grade focused on high school courses & mastering life/organizational skills ▪ Dual credit opportunities for students who meet requirements ▪ Internships & apprenticeships available

CAMPUS OBSERVATIONS

Many of the challenges that surfaced in initial conversations for this project were around logistical and operational issues, primarily related to traffic and lunch service. To further explore and understand these issues, the Boyette team spent time on campus to observe how these particular operational pieces were handled.

eStem students' morning arrival was observed on Tuesday, September 11, from 7:20 to 8:00 am. Two members of the Boyette team monitored the area around the high school building, particularly the intersection of University Avenue and University Drive, where it was reported that parents were dropping off students. Additionally, time was spent in the student parking area and observing traffic

flow into and out of the designated student drop-off point behind the University Plaza center. Following are findings from this observation:

Arrival Observations

- No student drop-offs were observed along University Avenue
- The majority of cars entered the University Plaza parking lot through entrances along University and Asher other than the designated entry at the far eastern end of the parking lot
- In a five-minute period, more than 25 cars entered the lot through the wrong entrance, many driving too fast for the location and conditions
- Some parent vehicles appeared to pull into the student parking area at the eastern end of University Plaza, drop off their student(s), and exit the lot without following the designated drop-off route
- Four UA Little Rock police officers were present throughout the period – 2 in front of University Plaza and two at the drop-off point behind the building
- No eStem staff was observed in the drop-off area

Also, on September 11, Boyette observed all three eStem lunch periods in the UA Little Rock dining hall and common areas of the Donaghey Student Center from 10:45 am to 1:45 pm. Additional lunch observations were conducted the following day, September 12. During the 2017-18 school year, the majority of eStem students ate lunch in the dining hall, which was accessible to all students, including those who brought a lunch from home or who purchased food from a vendor outside the dining hall. For the 2018-19 school year, the dining hall access has changed, allowing only those students who purchase a lunch in the dining hall to enter that space. Note that an additional change was made in this school year to further address issues of crowding in the dining hall area. eStem's schedule now includes three lunch periods, rather than two during the 2017-18 school year. Additionally, the price of lunch in the dining hall increased from approximately $5 per student to more than $8 per student. Following are findings of the two lunch observations:

Lunch Observations

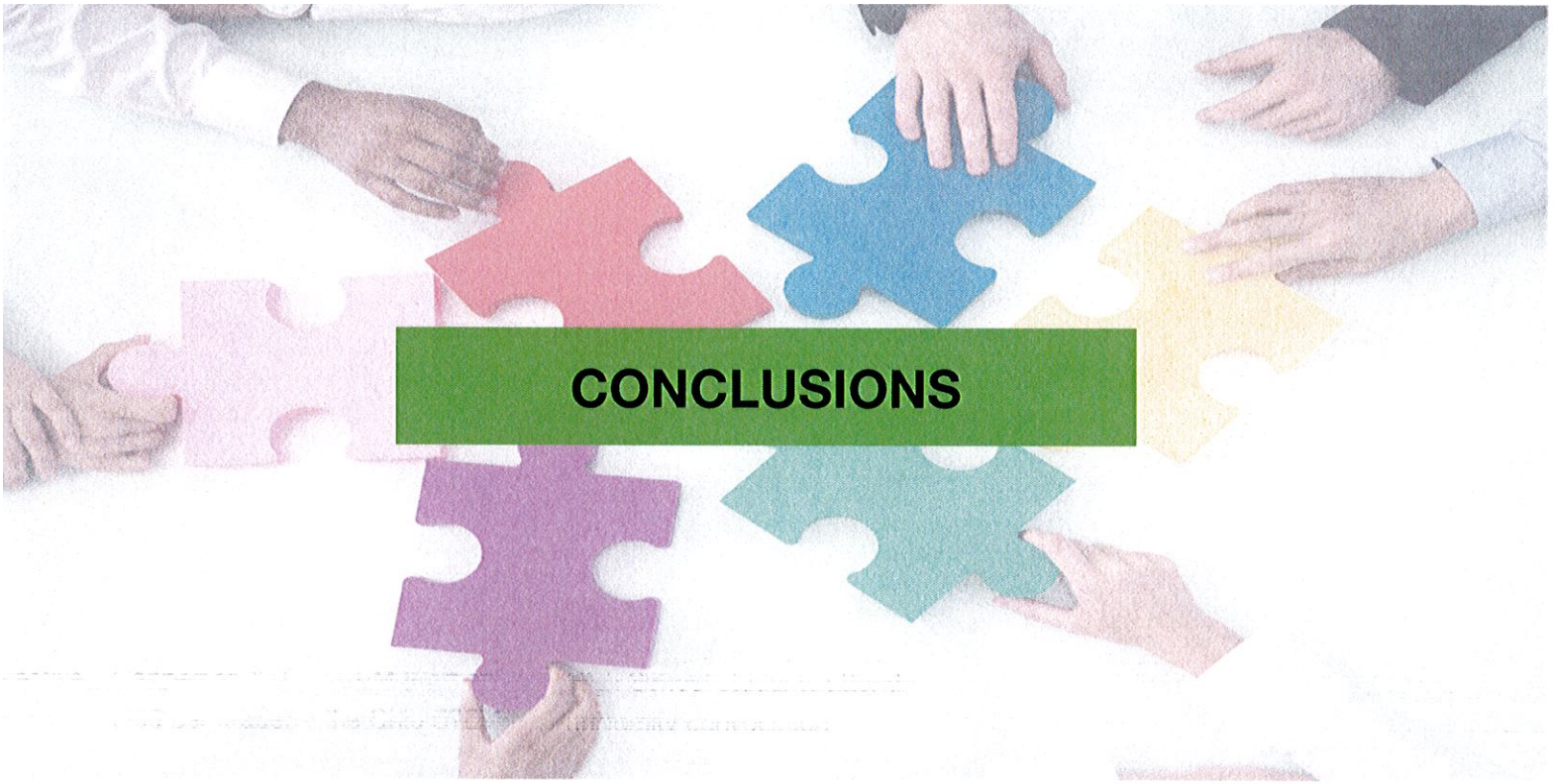
- Very few eStem students purchased lunch in the dining hall, leaving that space very open during all three lunch periods
- Some students purchased lunch from retail vendors in the commons area, some from the University bookstore, and many brought lunch from home
- All common areas of the Donaghey Student Center were crowded with eStem students, who were seated at tables, in lounge areas and on the floor
- Multiple eStem staff members were present in the commons areas monitoring student behavior

- The noise level was significant in the common areas, but student behavior was appropriate
- eStem students left trash at tables and did not return chairs to appropriate locations following lunch
- eStem staff members picked up trash and straightened the common areas following each lunch period
- The free and reduced lunch option (Mom's Catering) inside the dining hall was used by fewer than 10 students per lunch period

The final campus observation was conducted on Monday, September 24, during afternoon dismissal. As was done during the morning arrival observation, the Boyette team spent time monitoring the area at University Avenue and University Drive, in addition to the designated pick-up point at University Plaza. To further determine if the pick-up procedure was being followed, the team drove through campus and around the Donaghey Student Center multiple times between 3:15 and 4:00 pm. Following are observation findings related to student dismissal:

Dismissal Observations

- Several students crossed University Avenue at University Drive and walked toward retail parking areas on the west side of University Avenue
- One student crossed University Avenue and boarded a Rock Region Metro bus
- A large group of students waited for parent pick-up in the breezeway area of University Plaza
- The pick-up line was never long, but many parents had not arrived by 4 pm
- Two people appearing to be eStem students were picked up in the roundabout area near the Donaghey Student Center
- No eStem staff was observed at the pick-up location



CONCLUSIONS

It is essential that this feasibility enhancement report and its recommendations be founded on thorough research and findings. The findings from stakeholder engagement and secondary research have been carefully reviewed and analyzed in an effort to draw conclusions that will lead to opportunities for improving the relationship between UA Little Rock and eStem.

The conclusions resulting from this research reflect the cumulative impact of findings and identify those areas where opportunities exist for building on the strengths of the partnership and overcoming the challenges. Conclusions are addressed in the following areas:

- Operational Challenges
- Impact & Benefits
- Communications
- Policies

> "I think any time smart people come together, the opportunity for everyone's level of understanding and knowledge increases.

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

Much of the stakeholder discussion focused on operational challenges that surfaced in the first year of eStem's operation on the UA Little Rock campus. Issues cited by stakeholders included traffic and parking; meal service; library use; and general student behavior.

Boyette explored these topics in some depth with stakeholders from both institutions and also conducted on-campus observations in an effort to fully understand the issues and develop conclusions about their potential long-term impact and opportunities to address them. While some of the early issues that were identified during the 2017-18 school year have been addressed, others continue to be a source of concern.

Facilities

Based on this thorough review, Boyette has concluded that the existing Lease Agreement (August 2016) and Memorandum of Understanding (December 2016) established some unrealistic expectations that did not adequately take into account operational limitations such as the size of the UA Little Rock dining hall. This facility has a capacity of 522, while eStem will eventually have an enrollment of 1,125, which must be accommodated in three lunch periods with approximately 375 students in each. In addition to capacity, in the first year, the university community was concerned about eStem student behavior during lunch, as well as the belief that students were purchasing "all you can eat" meals, then sharing food with other students who did not pay to eat.

An effort was made to address these issues in the 2018-19 school year, which has effectively eliminated the capacity concern for the dining hall. First, eStem added a third lunch period to its schedule, which divided students into three groups rather than the two groups in the first year. Additionally, the university made modifications to the entry and cashier area of the dining hall, which limited dining hall entry to only those students purchasing a meal. Students who bring a lunch from home or who purchase something from a retail vendor in the Donaghey Student Center no longer have access to the dining hall. While this resolved the initial crowding issue, it simply created additional issues as virtually all eStem students now must spend their lunch period in the common areas of the Student Center, which does not have the seating capacity to accommodate them.

An additional, perhaps unanticipated, impact of the new dining hall arrangement is found in accessing lunches available for eStem students who qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program. Because this program requires meals served to meet federal nutritional guidelines, a separate meal service is provided in a small private dining space off the main university dining hall. Unfortunately, because of the challenges of accessing this space and the possible stigma attached to students who enter to obtain their free or reduced price meal, very few students take advantage of this program.

Approximately 40 percent (200) of eStem students are eligible for the program, but fewer than 20 per day typically eat the meal provided.

If eStem continues to increase enrollment, as is outlined in the MOU, additional classroom space will be required. The current lease agreement provides space in Ross Hall for that purpose. While the university is currently concerned about releasing that space for use by eStem, it is clear that there is an inventory of unused space on campus. It may require the university to rethink its space needs and adjust space allocation in certain facilities to free up the classrooms required by eStem's growing student population.

Traffic/Parking

In considering the traffic and parking issues raised by stakeholders, Boyette found very limited areas of concern. It has been determined that any unsafe drop-off and pick-up occurring along University Avenue is very limited, if it occurs at all. Signage has been placed throughout campus in areas that had previously been problem spots to reinforce for eStem students and parents the importance of following proper procedures.

As mentioned in the findings section of this document, the Boyette team did observe eStem students and families entering the drop-off line from various entrances other than the specified route. While this did not cause significant traffic issues, it did appear to create some safety concerns, particularly related to speed in the University Plaza parking lot. There have also been allegations of students parking in unauthorized areas on campus. Boyette concluded that some of the restricted parking areas in the University Plaza lot are not clearly labeled, which could lead to students parking in the wrong spaces. Additionally, eStem student cars are identified with a hang tag, which could easily be removed, potentially allowing students to park in areas open for retail/public parking. This could easily be alleviated by utilizing permanent parking stickers to identify student vehicles.

Liability

An additional area of concern related to operational considerations involves which institution has liability in the event something unforeseen happens to eStem students while on campus. This is an issue that should be thoroughly discussed by both parties, given that liability may shift when students leave Larson Hall and go to other areas of campus, both during the school day and, potentially, before and after school.

While many of these operational issues have been addressed at some level and have clearly been minimized going into the second year of eStem's operation on the university campus, the adjustments made do not, in most cases, provide realistic, long-term solutions. It is incumbent on both parties to explore and implement more permanent procedures to ensure successful operations well into the future.

IMPACT & BENEFITS

The integration of two organizations will always have impact on both entities and, in the case of strong, well developed partnerships, will also provide benefits to both. In the UA Little Rock – eStem partnership, some unanticipated negative impacts have been experienced by both organizations. At the same time, tangible benefits have been limited up until now.

Impacts

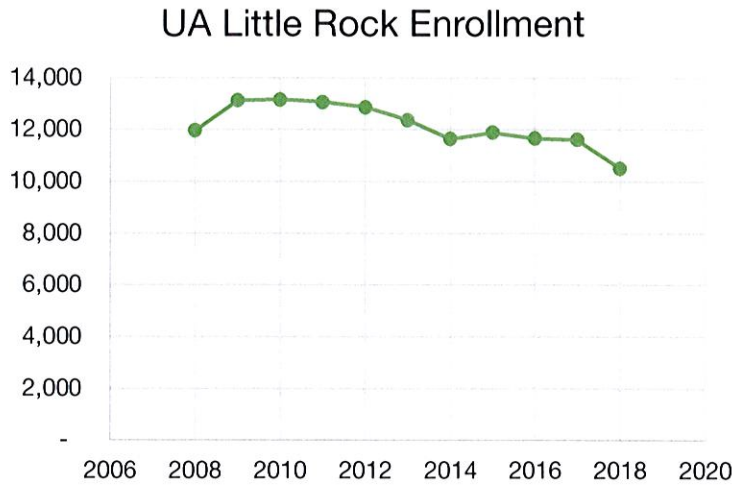
Some stakeholders have raised concerns about the negative impacts the partnership is having on the university. These concerns range from how the relationship affects campus culture to its role in UA Little Rock's declining enrollment.

UA Little Rock is a metropolitan university with a different demographic profile from more traditional four-year institutions. The campus has a relatively low number of students living on campus and an average age of 28.[24] Because of the high number of commuters, the campus does not have a significant focus on student life, as most students simply come on campus to attend class and leave, rather than participating in recreational and social activities that are typical of a more traditional residential campus.

This demographic profile tends to heighten the perceived impact of the presence of high school students on the UA Little Rock campus. With a greater age disparity, older students who commute are much less tolerant of typical teenage behaviors that may occur with the integration of eStem students into the broader university community. For example, there have been complaints about students throwing Frisbees and footballs on the campus lawn. While this may be a common occurrence on college campuses with a strong student life focus, it is rare to see this at UA Little Rock.

Additionally, many UA Little Rock students work full time and attend classes primarily in the evenings. This diminishes the size of the daytime population on campus to approximately 2,500 university students. The presence of 500 high school students has a magnified effect when they make up 20 percent of the overall daytime student population, as compared to some of the benchmark schools that were examined where university enrollment is almost 60,000,[25] with only 400 high school students. This ratio of high school students to university students has a direct impact on the overall campus culture, which will continue to increase as eStem enrollment more than doubles in the coming years.

Some stakeholders have stated that declining enrollment at UA Little Rock is caused, at least in part, by the partnership with eStem, even though the partnership was expected to attract additional students to the university. The university's enrollment has declined seven of the last eight years, with the largest decline occurring from 2017 to 2018 after remaining fairly constant from 2014 to 2017. The university saw a significant increase in enrollment in 2009 and peaked in 2010 at 13,176, which may have been attributed, at least in part, to the recession as unemployed people returned to school for additional training.



One could surmise several things in analyzing the enrollment trends. Increases could be attributed to everything from the recession to basketball team(s) success and presence in NCAA tournaments, while causes of declines might range from eStem's presence on the campus to the demand for online learning opportunities. To fully understand the reasons for enrollment shifts would require significant analysis into these factors, as well as student attitudes about the university.

The agreement between the two institutions provides general guidance concerning services to be provided by UA Little Rock and paid for by eStem. However, the partnership has resulted in some unforeseen costs for the university. This includes the general effect an additional 500 students has on campus facilities and grounds, in addition to costs associated with security and with student dining.

Benefits

From the time this partnership was first discussed as a concept, how it would benefit both UA Little Rock and eStem has been a consideration. Potential benefits have been detailed in various documents, beginning with the concept white paper written in 2015. However, for a variety of reasons, many of those benefits have yet to come to fruition.

While neither institution has realized all the benefits anticipated, at this point in the relationship, the potential benefits to UA Little Rock are minimal, which makes the partnership unbalanced and strained. One expected significant benefit to the university was the possibility of increased enrollment from eStem graduates. Not only did that not occur in year one, but in fact, most stakeholders doubt the likelihood of that ever being a significant benefit. Students generally do not want to attend college where they attended high school and are often seeking a change in their surroundings, and only 28 percent of eStem parents agree or strongly agree that attending high school on the UA Little Rock campus will make their child more likely to enroll at the university following graduation. However, even

if eStem students did enroll in higher numbers than they had prior to the partnership, it would likely be offset by the non-eStem students who may not choose UA Little Rock when they learn of the presence of a high school on the campus.

There are certainly opportunities to build on and create additional benefits for both the university and eStem, particularly related to academics. Collaborative efforts tied to academics could enhance the relationship not just at the institutional level, but also student to student. While these opportunities will be explored in more detail in the Recommendations section of this document, it is clear the **students from both institutions are interested in working together** in mentoring relationships, tutoring, and shadowing, **with a focus on academics**. Similarly, faculty from UA Little Rock and eStem have the opportunity to collaborate in ways that will expand their teaching and research and improve the overall quality of instruction.

As the partnership between UA Little Rock and eStem moves forward, it is critical that the two institutions develop a common set of metrics by which to measure success of the relationship. This would not only be important to the leadership of both institutions as a tool for monitoring success and making adjustments as needed, but also will serve as a reassurance to stakeholders that the collaboration is strong and valuable.

COMMUNICATIONS

Conversations with stakeholders and additional research indicate that communication with stakeholders about the partnership has not been consistent between the two institutions and has been inadequate in some instances. In fact, this breakdown in communication has led to some of the complaints, particularly on operational issues, that might have been easily resolved with effective messaging.

UA Little Rock students who participated in a facilitated discussion about the presence of eStem on the campus had virtually no knowledge about eStem as an institution or about the partnership between the two institutions. Many of the concerns they voiced in that meeting were easily addressed with a simple explanation of the relationship. As an example, students believed that their tuition dollars were used to renovate Larson Hall and were also concerned about other costs associated with eStem that might be the responsibility of the university. Other university stakeholders, including faculty, have not had adequate communication to fully understand the partnership and the potential benefits it has for UA Little Rock.

Additionally, eStem parents seem to circumvent some campus rules, such as drop-off and pick-up processes, among others. While the operational challenges that surfaced in the first year of the partnership likely contributed to that, additional communication with the university and eStem speaking with a collective voice might be valuable in resolving those issues. The MOU outlines a

collaborative orientation process for eStem students and parents. This approach should be expanded to ensure that all eStem stakeholders have a thorough understanding of the processes and regulations that are in place and why they are important to their children's safety and success.

POLICIES

Existing policies and regulations have created hurdles for some of the collaborative opportunities envisioned for this partnership. None of them appears to be insurmountable, but all require thoughtful attention to address them in a way that allows the full success of the partnership.

One of the early expected benefits of the UA Little Rock – eStem relationship was the opportunity for university education majors to have a learning lab on campus where they could participate in field experiences. The challenge that arose lies in the fact the eStem, as a charter school, is not subject to all the same requirements of other public schools, including the hiring of certified teachers. However, state regulations require that education majors complete their internship or student teaching "under the guidance and supervision of licensed practicing school personnel..." [26] This regulation should be discussed with the Arkansas Department of Education to determine if a waiver of this requirement might be possible.

The opportunities for dual enrollment and/or concurrent credit for eStem students have not been made available at this time. This was a key centerpiece of the relationship from the earliest stages and should be pursued to fulfill this potential benefit to both institutions. Implementing this component of the partnership may require some policy changes related to how high school students are admitted to these programs and how costs of the programs are covered. A specific admissions policy should be developed that outlines the qualifications eStem students must meet in order to enroll in college-level offerings, whether through dual enrollment or concurrent credit.

BEST PRACTICE

The University of New Haven (Connecticut) offers a pre-college program to students at the Engineering & Science University Magnet School. The Segue To Education Program (STEP) allows eligible students to earn college credit at no cost to the student, with the exception of textbooks and lab fees. Students must submit an application and participate in an interview process to compete for limited spots for high school students. The University's Office of Undergraduate Admissions manages the application process. Course assignment and placement are determined by the University, and participating students can enroll in only one class per semester. Program participants also must attend a mandatory on-campus orientation program.

Source: http://www.newhaven.edu/admissions/pre-college/esums/classes.php

Given the operational challenges and the overall impact that eStem's large enrollment will have on the UA Little Rock campus, more complete integration of eStem students into the university should be limited to upper level students. This could mean either junior and senior level high school students or only seniors. This concept will be addressed more thoroughly in the Recommendations section of this document, but should be viewed as an opportunity and a privilege that eStem students eagerly anticipate from the time they enroll at eStem High School.

OVERVIEW

With the previous findings and conclusions defined, it is necessary to consider the overarching framework of the relationship before moving into specific action steps to enhance the partnership between UA Little Rock and eStem. While individual tasks and actions may address individual challenges that have arisen, it is clear that major changes will be required to move the partnership toward the success that was envisioned from the start.

Following are four overarching recommendations scenarios that have been defined as possible approaches to enhancing the UA Little Rock – eStem partnership.

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATION SCENARIOS	
SCENARIO 1	▪ Maintain the existing arrangement ▪ Make minor adjustments to address operational issues ▪ Limit eStem enrollment to 500 students
SCENARIO 2	▪ Construct a new cafeteria and commons area ▪ Define appropriate outdoor space for eStem students ▪ Realign UA Little Rock space to open up classroom facilities in Ross Hall
SCENARIO 3	▪ Construct a second facility to house grades 10 and 11 ▪ Include cafeteria and other amenities in the new facility ▪ Utilize Larson Hall for eStem seniors ▪ Engage UA Little Rock instructors for dual credit coursework
SCENARIO 4	▪ Construct a second facility or renovate an existing facility for eStem seniors ▪ Add cafeteria space to Larson Hall ▪ Fully integrate eStem **seniors** into UA Little Rock facilities and systems ▪ Engage UA Little Rock instructors for dual credit coursework

Once the scenarios were defined, the Boyette team carefully thought through each to determine if all were, in fact, viable and which one(s) might be the strongest option to address the identified issues and challenges.

The first scenario is basically a **"business as usual"** approach, with the exception that is requires capping eStem enrollment at its current level of 500 students. This option will, in the long term, not

RECOMMENDATIONS

The end result of the research conducted for this feasibility enhancement is a series of recommendations designed to build upon and strengthen the relationship between UA Little Rock and eStem in a way that benefits both institutions.

The recommendations which follow are based on a series of considerations that assume a continuing relationship between the two entities. In addition to an overarching scenario, the recommendations address the following topics:

- Facilities
- Relationships
- Benefits

Recommendation Considerations

- The original intent was a win-win situation for all with support of the Walton Family Foundation.
- The current arrangement is little more than a tenant/owner relationship.
- A new approach must identify benefits to both parties.
- There is an assumption that UA Little Rock and eStem will move forward together, supported by enhanced communication and thoughtful integration.

> "We have to come up with an agreement between the two entities that provides a path forward in which both organizations benefit.

allow for any enhancement of the partnership and, ultimately, neither institution will see the benefits it expected when entering the relationship.

Scenario 2 would **resolve the major pain points** that have surfaced in the relationship by addressing dining, traffic/parking, and space for eStem students to use during free time. However, this option also does not address those relationship components that were originally developed for the mutual benefit of eStem and UA Little Rock – including better integration into the campus, the opportunity for eStem students to earn college credits, and the use of eStem to enhance the training of UA Little Rock education majors.

The final two scenarios both call for **additional classroom space that allows for the segregation of the eStem senior class**, which is similar to the initial agreement that included two facilities. This would allow for a focus on more complete integration for only those students in the final year in high school. It is anticipated that this would eliminate some of the challenges that exist primarily resulting from the age and maturity gap between the youngest high school students and college students. Additionally, it reduces the size of the high school population that is using campus facilities and interfacing with UA Little Rock students, faculty and staff. Finally, these scenarios allow for implementation of a dual enrollment offering that is more manageable for both institutions.

Based on this analysis, **the recommendation is to pursue either Scenario 3 or Scenario 4**.

FACILITIES

Three of the four overarching recommendation scenarios call for additional facilities to accommodate the growing eStem enrollment and address some of the operational issues that have been experienced in the first 15 months of operation. While some of these recommendations include facility recommendations over and above the plan to expand classroom space into Ross Hall. It is clear that the current facilities for dining simply are not adequate, even at current enrollment levels that will ultimately more than double under the current plan. In addition, many of the issues surrounding arrival and dismissal could be alleviated with availability of a commons area where eStem students could gather before and after school.

The recommended scenarios 3 and 4 also include additional classroom space allowing eStem to house senior students in a separate facility. Several options likely exist for this approach, and input from educators and architects will be necessary to determine the best choice.

It may be possible to add a dining hall to Larson Hall and have adequate space to use that facility for 10th and 11th grade students. In this scenario, it is recommended that an existing UA Little Rock facility be considered for renovation to house the eStem seniors. Ideally, this building will be more centrally located on campus, allowing for greater integration opportunities for senior students.

If Larson Hall is not large enough to accommodate two grades, as well as a cafeteria, the institutions should explore using that facility for senior students and possibly adding additional amenities such as study rooms for individuals and groups with online library access. In this scenario, a second building would need to be constructed for 10th and 11th grades, with that facility also including a cafeteria and other needed amenities. In both recommended scenarios, senior students who qualified would also have access to dual enrollment courses, which would further reduce the needed classroom space.

RELATIONSHIPS

At the core of this partnership is the opportunity to develop relationships between UA Little Rock and eStem, not just at the institutional level, but across all stakeholder groups. By doing this at all levels, much of the tension and animosity that have defined the partnership in the early stages will dissipate. Students from both institutions have indicated a desire to get to know and understand each other on a more personal level. Likely faculty and staff would have similar ideas if given the opportunity to explore them in a more collaborative environment.

Academics

Not surprisingly, academics are the logical starting point for these cross-institutional collaborations. Some may be very easy to implement, while others will take more time and planning, but all have the opportunity to not just enhance the relationship between UA Little Rock and eStem, but to also strengthen the quality of education offered by both institutions.

Action Item: Create a Mentorship Program

University students should serve as mentors to eStem students who share common academic interests. The program should be structured to match university and high school students through various program majors, possibly focused on STEM areas of study. The university students might provide some academic support, as well as just serving as a resource for the challenges of high school and the college search process. Students might also shadow in college classes once a semester and attend university programs together.

Action Item: Establish Admissions Process for Dual Enrollment

The dual enrollment component of the UA Little Rock – eStem partnership should be fully developed and made available to eStem students who are academically ready for college-level coursework. The two institutions should work together to develop an admissions process that identifies those students who qualify for dual enrollment courses. Other parameters of the program should also be established, including what courses are available for dual enrollment; how many courses students may take; what the cost will be; and how they integrate into the eStem schedule.

Action Item: Resolve Issues Related to Student Teaching

As described in the Conclusions section of this document, a regulatory issue is currently limiting the opportunity for UA Little Rock education majors to complete internships or student teaching assignments at eStem. Both institutions should come together to develop a potential solution and work with the Arkansas Department of Education to obtain approval for eStem to serve as an internship/student teaching site for UA Little Rock students.

Action Item: Explore Opportunities for Other Collaborative Training for UA Little Rock Students

In addition to eStem serving as a learning and training site for education majors, the high school might also offer opportunities for students in other majors that require hands-on experience. For example, eStem could potentially host a nursing clinical focused on public health, as well as offering opportunities for students in the Social Work, Speech Pathology, and Counseling programs.

Action Item: Develop a Graduate Fellows Program

UA Little Rock should appoint Fellows who are graduate degree candidates in STEM areas. These graduate students would collaborate with an eStem teacher in their subject area on opportunities to enhance curriculum and instruction at the high school level. Additionally, the Fellows might also speak to eStem classes and support the mentorship relationships that are developed in their academic areas.

Campus Events & Programs

Like most universities, UA Little Rock hosts a variety of campus events and programs, ranging from fundraising events to guest speakers, as well as arts and cultural offerings. eStem students and their families should be invited to those campus events that are open to the public or to the broader university community.

BEST PRACTICE

The Metro Fellows program at The Ohio State University is a collaboration between the University and Metro Early College High School. Metro Fellows are PhD candidates in Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Engineering who are paired with a high school teacher in their discipline. They offer knowledge, laboratory techniques, and practical application of science and engineering principles, while also helping to improve curriculum and instruction for high school students. Additionally, these Fellows serve as mentors to high school students and share their career pathways with them.

Source: https://www.themetroschool.org/about/osu-partnership/

Action Item: Include eStem in Annual Freshman Convocation

UA Little Rock annually holds a Freshman Convocation to welcome new students, faculty and staff. eStem rising seniors, faculty and staff should be invited to participate in the event that celebrates the beginning of the academic year.

Action Item: Host eStem Night at Trojan Athletic Events

To enhance the Trojan Athletics fan base, the university could host "eStem Night at the Jack." Students with an eStem ID could be admitted free, with special reduced price tickets for eStem families. In addition, eStem athletes and cheerleaders might be recognized or possibly provide some half-time or between games entertainment. Opportunities may also exist to host similar events for other sports such as baseball and soccer.

Action Item: Showcase eStem Artwork in Windgate Center Exhibit

A special exhibit of eStem student artwork might be curated and shown at the Windgate Center of Art + Design. eStem could host a special event for stakeholders to open the exhibit. A competition might also be incorporated that would recognize on eStem art student who would then have the opportunity to work as an "artist in residence" at the Windgate Center for a semester.

Action Item: Identify University Events Tied to eStem Curriculum

eStem faculty and staff should monitor the UA Little Rock events calendar on an ongoing basis to identify opportunities to enhance instruction through university programming. For example, a speaker on a current event topic might tie into the social studies curriculum. When those events are identified, eStem should coordinate with the university to secure seating for eStem students.

Community Service

Coming together for a community cause allows people from different groups to work toward a common goal. Creating joint community service opportunities would allow UA Little Rock and eStem students, faculty and staff to develop personal relationships that would likely carry over into academic pursuits.

Action Item: Identify a "Signature" Community Service Opportunity

Both institutions should select a joint community service opportunity that would energize both groups to work together. This could be participation as a team in a walk to benefit a charity or taking on a significant work project, such as a Habitat for Humanity build. Every effort should be made to ensure that the teams of students and staff are integrated and have the opportunity to work together. Once the best opportunity is selected, it should be considered an annual activity for the joint team.

Action Item: Create a Student-Led Campus Service Project

In addition to external community service, UA Little Rock and eStem should work jointly on a campus service project. This might be a clean-up and beautification effort for part of the campus or activities to support the university's food pantry, for example. This, too, should be an annual project, possibly alternating between a project focused on eStem and one focused on UA Little Rock. This effort should be student led, with a steering committee of students representing both institutions planning the project and recruiting volunteers to participate.

BENEFITS

A healthy partnership is virtually impossible if either partner does not perceive benefit from the relationship. While benefits to both UA Little Rock and eStem were identified in the early stages of developing this concept, many of those have not come to fruition, while at the same time, unforeseen costs and other hardships have surfaced. If this issue is not addressed, the partnership will not succeed.

Define & Measure

In order to determine and realize the benefits of the partnership, opportunities for positive impact must be defined and measured.

Action Item: Identify Specific Benefits to Both Partners

Once changes to the current relationship structure are finalized, specific anticipated benefits to both UA Little Rock and eStem must be identified and defined. These benefits should extend beyond those related to finances and enrollment and consider the overall impact of how the relationship is improving educational opportunities for students, career development for faculty and staff, and ultimately, how it impacts the broader Central Arkansas community.

Action Item: Define Metrics to Monitor Success

After potential benefits have been fully identified and defined, the two institutions should work together to develop metrics by which to measure the success of the relationship. These should be quantifiable metrics that measure outcomes rather than activity, with realistic but aggressive annual goals set for each. In addition to defining the metrics, a process for monitoring progress toward the goals should also be developed that brings together both institutions on at least a quarterly basis to determine the status of each metric and make course adjustments as needed.

Stronger Ties

As the early challenges affecting the partnership are addressed, UA Little Rock and eStem will begin to develop stronger ties that will lead to additional benefits to both. With enhanced relationships at the highest levels will come a sense of goodwill across all stakeholder groups.

Action Item: Increase Matriculation of eStem Students to UA Little Rock

The opportunity for UA Little Rock to see increased enrollment from eStem students will require work and commitment from both partners. UA Little Rock offers an excellent opportunity for post-secondary education for many eStem students. However, students must feel welcome and have the opportunity to experience the university in ways that will encourage matriculation.

Because this is the single most significant benefit of this relationship to the university, it should be included in the MOU guiding the relationship. Using historical data, the two institutions should determine realistic goals for enrollment of eStem graduates and develop financial incentives tied to reaching those matriculation goals.

Action Item: Create an eStem Scholars Program at UA Little Rock

To further enhance the possibility of eStem students choosing to enroll at UA Little Rock, an eStem Scholars Program should be established at the university. This program should provide significant scholarship dollars, as well as research opportunities, to top eStem graduates who pursue a STEM degree at UA Little Rock. The two institutions should jointly develop criteria for the scholarships and work together to identify one or more donors to endow the program.

Action Item: Develop Collaborative Key Messages

UA Little Rock and eStem should work together to develop a series of collaborative key messages that position the relationship in a positive, innovative and beneficial light. These messages should speak to the assets of the two institutions and the ways it will enhance the educational and professional experiences of students and staff at both. Good news about either institution should also be shared with both groups of stakeholders, and both UA Little Rock and eStem should monitor and cross-promote social media posts related to success stories, as well as critical news items. Key message content should also serve to inform university faculty and students generally about eStem and its approach to education.

Additionally, the communications process should be evaluated to ensure that critical communications are shared with both organizations in a timely manner. eStem staff and families should receive the same notification that is sent to UA Little Rock students and staff.

ENDNOTES

[1] Concept White Paper, Exploring the Possibility of a Campus-Based eStem K-12 Charter School at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, February 5, 2015, page 24
[2] Concept White Paper, Exploring the Possibility of a Campus-Based eStem K-12 Charter School at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, February 5, 2015, pages 18-23
[3] Agreement, Board of Trustees of the University of Arkansas, eStem Public Charter Schools and eStem High Public Charter School, July 24, 2015, page 3
[4] Agreement, Board of Trustees of the University of Arkansas, eStem Public Charter Schools and eStem High Public Charter School, July 24, 2015, page 5
[5] Minutes, University of Arkansas at Little Rock Board of Visitors, August 14, 2015
[6] News Release, UALR, eStem Announce Innovative Partnership, August 17, 2015
[7] Little Rock Planning Commission, File No. Z-9073, September 24, 2015, page 10
[8] Little Rock Planning Commission, File No. Z-9073, December 17, 2015, page 10
[9] Little Rock Planning Commission, File No. Z-9073, January 28, 2016, page 11
[10] News Release, UALR, eStem Announce Groundbreaking for New School, August 15, 2016
[11] Lease Agreement, Board of Trustees of the University of Arkansas and eStem Public Charter Schools, August 29, 2016
[12] Lease Agreement, Board of Trustees of the University of Arkansas and eStem Public Charter Schools, August 29, 2016, page 1
[13] Lease Agreement, Board of Trustees of the University of Arkansas and eStem Public Charter Schools, August 29, 2016, page 6
[14] Memorandum of Understanding, University of Arkansas at Little Rock and eStem Public Charter Schools, December 9, 2016 and First Amendment to Memorandum of Understanding of 2016, University of Arkansas at Little Rock and eStem Public Charter Schools, July 13, 2017
[15] Concept White Paper, Exploring the Possibility of a Campus-Based eStem K-12 Charter School at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, February 5, 2015
[16] Agreement, Board of Trustees of the University of Arkansas, eStem Public Charter Schools and eStem High Public Charter School, July 24, 2015
[17] Lease Agreement, Board of Trustees of the University of Arkansas and eStem Public Charter Schools, August 29, 2016
[18] Memorandum of Understanding, University of Arkansas at Little Rock and eStem Public Charter Schools, December 9, 2016 and First Amendment to Memorandum of Understanding of 2016, University of Arkansas at Little Rock and eStem Public Charter Schools, July 13, 2017
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